



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Economic Development Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: Mayor Diane Wolfe Marlin and City Council Members

FROM: Sheila Dodd, Interim Community Development Services Director
Darius White, Economic Development Coordinator

DATE: June 15, 2022

SUBJECT: **Commercial Signage Grant Program**

The City of Urbana will replace its Business Opening Grant and Business Development Grant with a Commercial Signage Grant Program through the Tax Increment Finance Incentive Program

The Commercial Signage Grant Program provides matching grant funds to businesses in order to enhance their store fronts with the addition or improvement of commercial signage. Established using TIF to provide matching grants to business and commercial property owners who wish to renovate and improve highly visible buildings along commercial corridors within the TIF districts. The primary objective of the Commercial Signage Grant Program is to promote and assist in supporting the City's businesses by providing grants for replacing and/or adding new signage to commercial storefronts that contribute to the vitality of the area.

Businesses that meet the criteria may receive a \$2,000 grant. Funding will be matched by 50% of total project cost up to \$2,000 maximum funding availability. For instance, a project requesting a \$2,000 grant award will require a minimum \$4,000 total project cost.

The Commercial Signage Grant Program will begin Friday, July 1st.



Commercial Signage Grant Program Guidelines

The Commercial Signage Grant can be used toward the design, purchase, and installation of a commercial sign on properties located in a TIF District or the Philo Road Business District. Funds may also be used towards purchase and installation of awnings, when awnings include a logo and/or business name. This grant is a matching grant (cost sharing) that requires the applicant to provide matching funds to contribute to new signage.

Commercial Signage Grant Program Guidelines

Eligibility Requirements

Work that does not comply with the eligibility requirements is subject to reduction or retraction of award.

- ✓ Only work begun **after** approval by the Commercial Signage Grant Program Administrator will be eligible for a grant.
- ✓ All work must be done on the exterior of the building and result in a publicly visible improvement.
 - **Work on the rear or roof of the building is not eligible for a signage grant.**
- ✓ All work must be done on a street fronting side of an existing building.
 - If the entrance of business is not street fronting, the business can still apply.
 - Shared space businesses must have a separate exterior entrance.
- ✓ *Grant funds cannot be used to correct outstanding code violations*, for property damaged by collision, acts of nature or occurrences covered by insurance.
- ✓ All work must comply with the Commercial Signage Grant Program's design guidelines and receive approval of a Sign Permit. Sign Permits can be applied for online, and must comply with the Zoning Ordinance.
- ✓ Project cost must exceed **\$500** to be considered for a signage grant.
- ✓ Live/work studios must be within a building classified as commercial or mixed-use. Staff will conduct a site visit prior to approval.

Properties that are NOT Eligible

The following types of property are not eligible for the Signage Grant Program:

- ✓ **Tax delinquent property**
- ✓ **Property whose owner has any other tax delinquent property**
- ✓ **Property in litigation**
- ✓ **Property in condemnation or receivership**
- ✓ **Property owned by religious groups**
- ✓ **Property owned by 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations on which taxes are not being paid**
- ✓ **Properties, on which taxes are being paid, but have nonprofit use, such as schools, charities, clubs, organizations, etc.**
- ✓ **Exclusively residential buildings**
- ✓ **Daycare Centers**
- ✓ **National franchises or retail chain stores**
- ✓ **Funeral homes**
- ✓ **Properties outside of a TIF District or the Philo Road Business District**

Required Materials for Application

Application packages must include enough documentation to illustrate the visual impact of the project and its costs. **Failure to provide required information will delay the review process.** The items submitted should include:

- A completed application form with a current W-9 form.**
- Written consent from property owner giving permission to conduct signage improvements.**
- Color photographs of existing conditions.**
- Any other documentation necessary to illustrate the visual impact of the proposed project.
- Submit two competitive proposals from contractors.** These proposals should give detailed information about the work to be done, the costs, and the project completion schedule. Any bona fide contractor who has submitted a competitive detailed estimate may be used.
- Owners or merchants who intend to perform work on their own properties or businesses, must furnish at least one proposal other than their own for the scope of work to be done.
- Owners and merchants may also perform work on their own buildings; however, they will not be reimbursed for their time while acting as contractor and/or installing material. **Material costs and labor of employees are reimbursable; however, documentation must be produced for the number of hours worked on the project by the employees, the rate of pay of the employees, etc.**
- All signage, awnings, and paintings must comply with City of Urbana Codes and Ordinances. This includes the **Zoning Ordinance**. Please contact Planning@urbanaininois.us for any questions about zoning requirements.*

Award Reimbursement

Reimbursement shall be limited to no more than 50% of the total cost of eligible improvements, not to exceed \$2,000. The cost of any necessary government approvals, building permits, and taxes are not eligible items for reimbursement. Any projects totaling less than \$500 are not eligible.

The City of Urbana reserves the right to refuse reimbursements in whole or in part for work that:

- ✓ Does not conform to the program design guidelines and has not received permit approval.
- ✓ **Do not conform to the proposals submitted with your application and authorized by the Commercial Signage Grant Program Administrator.**
- ✓ Are not commensurate with the workmanship and cost customary to the industry
- ✓ Are not completed within **6 months**. Since funds cannot be reserved indefinitely, a grant may be subject to cancellation if not completed or significant progress hasn't been made by the completion date. **Request for extensions will be considered only if made in writing and adequate progress towards completion has been demonstrated.**

Building Safety staff will inspect work to ensure that it complies with the approved plans. Any changes to the approved plan will require a written request from the applicant and approval by the Commercial Signage Grant Program Administrator in order to retain the signage grant.

Required Materials for Reimbursement

Reimbursement can be expected in approximately **90 Days** after all of the following documentation has been submitted:

- Copies of all paid invoices, canceled checks, and or bank statements for all of the signage work completed.**
- Lien waivers cannot be substituted for canceled checks or bank statements.***
- Color photographs of completed project.**

Design Guidelines for Signage

New signage should be traditional in character to complement the architecture of many of the older buildings in Urbana's neighborhoods. There are many types of traditional signs that are appropriate for use on older storefronts.

Sign Boards

A flat signboard with hand painted raised lettering is the most appropriate type of sign for older commercial buildings. These signs should be placed in the narrow band above the storefront. Modern internally lit box signs are not permitted.

Awning Signs

Awning signs have lettering on the edge flap or skirting of the awning that remains visible when the awning is either retracted or opened.

Display Window Lettering

Another common type of storefront signage is lettering that is painted on or etched into the interior side of display windows and glazed entry doorways. These signs should consist of lettering and/or a logo, should not cover more than 20% of the area of the glass panel, and should not obscure the display area.

Hanging Signs

Hanging signs are signs that project from a buildings wall and are supported by metal brackets. These signs can come in all shapes and sizes and are sometimes made in the likeness of objects and symbols associated with an actual type of business. These signs should project no more than four feet from the face of the building and should not obscure the signage of other nearby businesses. The signs and brackets should be designed to complement the architecture of the building and should be mounted in the mortar joints of masonry buildings. All projecting signs should be hung within the base zone of the building or parallel to the second story window, and be externally lit. Internally lit and moving projecting signs are not permitted.

Transom Signs

A transom sign is made of leaded glass letters that are built into the transom above the storefront display window or door. This can be illuminated at night with backlighting or illuminated from the lower interior part of the store lights. These signs can be made today by leaded glass craft workers and can be made as easily to remove panels.

Neon Signs

Neon signs first became popular in the late 1920s and 30s, and are a seeing a renaissance in popularity today. There are many neon sign artists who can design new signage that will complement old storefronts. Exterior neon signs are most appropriate for post 1920s commercial buildings, while neon signs that are mounted within a display window can be successfully adapted for use on all types of commercial structures.

Yard Signs

When appropriate, permanent yard signs can be used. However, sign posts in yards should not be more than 10 feet in height.

Awnings & Entrance Canopies

If storefront awnings are to be used, they should be of a traditional tent style. Internally illuminated, half round hoop, and truncated wedge shaped awnings will generally not be approved. Awnings should be made of canvas or neoprene impregnated fabric instead of shiny vinyl. Awnings with soffit panels should not be used to allow the structure on the underside of the awning to be exposed. Custom awnings may be approved if sensitively designed to enhance a new storefront design.

Paintings

Paintings should consist of the business name and/or logo. Murals are not permitted.

Sign Regulations

- ✓ For more information see **Zoning** Ordinance, Article IX. *Please contact Planning@urbanaininois.us for any questions about zoning requirements.*



Commercial Signage Grant Program Application

The Commercial Signage Grant can be used toward the design, purchase, and installation of a commercial sign. Funds may also be used towards the purchase and installation of awnings, when awnings include a logo and/or business name. Properties eligible for this program must be located in a TIF District or the Philo Road Business District.

What is the Commercial Signage Grant Program?

The Commercial Signage Grant Program provides matching grant funds to businesses to enhance their store fronts with the addition or improvement of commercial signage. Established using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to provide matching grants to business and commercial property owners who wish to renovate, enhance, and improve highly visible buildings along commercial corridors within the TIF districts. The primary objective of the Commercial Signage Grant Program is to promote and assist in supporting the City's businesses by providing grants for replacing and/or adding new signage to commercial storefronts that contribute to the vitality of the area.

What is the maximum grant amount?

Businesses that meet the criteria may receive a \$2,000 grant. Funding will be matched by 50% of total project cost up to \$2,000 maximum funding availability. For instance, a project requesting a \$2,000 grant will require a minimum \$4,000 total project cost. Permit costs are not eligible for use as an award or match.

Minimum Requirements:

- The new or expanding business must be located within the boundaries of an eligible district. The business must either own the building or have a signed lease for at least a full year of tenancy and provide a copy of the lease/contract to the City.
 - At staff discretion, subleases or contracts for exclusive tenancy may be considered eligible when such agreement is for at least one full year of tenancy and when such agreement is entered into by a business that is both legally distinct from and has proprietors, operators, branding, and merchandise that are all different from the primary lease holder, property owner, and any other grant recipients in adjacent or nearby locations.
 - Co-tenants under the same lease or contract are not eligible for multiple Commercial Signage Grants.
 - A single business entity operating at adjacent or nearby locations is eligible for only one grant.
- An individual person or business entity may only receive one commercial signage grant within a five year period.
- Grants are only approved in writing by the TIF Administrator upon review of a formally submitted, complete application. No verbal commitment to funding will be recognized. Verbal or written feedback on a business's general eligibility or comments on a draft application shall not be construed as approval or disapproval of an application.
- The City must receive a current W-9 from the business to award the grant.
- The City must receive proof of payment and receipts for eligible expenses equal to twice the amount of the grant awarded.
- The premise must have a valid Certificate of Occupancy for the applicant's proposed use.
- The premise must obtain a permit for a [Permanent Sign](#). Signage requires a building permit everywhere in Urbana with few exceptions. Review regulations and requirements in the [Zoning Ordinance, Article 9](#). For any questions please email Planning@urbanaininois.us.

The following shall be eligible for funding through the program:

- Signage; must be a professionally produced, meet the requirements of the landlord if renting;
- Awnings and canopies (when including logo and/or business names); and
- Professional architectural/design/contractor fees for eligible projects.

- Multiple signs for the same business are eligible up to the maximum grant amount

The following shall not be eligible for funding through the program:

- Signs resulting in noncommercial message, fluttering devices/banners, billboards, moving/rotating signs, temporary signs, reader boards, anything that flashes or adds glare onto public ways or adjacent properties;
- Buildings and signs for residential and non-profit uses; and
- Non-permanent or temporary signage.

Important information concerning payments:

- Any work billed, or materials invoiced, before the date that the Signage Grant application is approved by the City of Urbana will NOT be available for grant funding.
- Any payments presented must have a proof of price and a transaction. This can be through invoice, credit card receipt, or a copy of a valid check or money order.
- The City shall only pay 50 percent of any payment presented, up to the approved grant amount.
- Payment of the grant will not be made until the project is completed.
- Payment will be made within 90 days of reimbursement submission.
- Projects must be completed within six months of being awarded a grant. Failure to meet this timeline may result in nullification of the grant contract.

How do I apply?

- Contact the Economic Development Division to discuss whether this grant is a good fit for your business.
- Fill out the attached application form and submit it to the Economic Development Division. ***All grant applications are subject to the availability of funding.***

Sign Regulations

- For more information see Zoning Ordinance [Chapter IX Sign and OASS Regulations](#). For questions about sign regulations, contact Planning@urbanaininois.us.



Application Form – Commercial Signage Grant Program

All applications are subject to the availability of funding.

TIF District /Philo RD Business District

This business is or will be located in a TIF or Business District: Central 2 4 Philo Rd

Applicant Information

Applicant Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

*Please attach a completed **W-9 form** in addition to this application.*

Business Information

Business Name: _____

Business Address: _____

Brief Signage Description: _____

*Please attach **two competitive contractors** and a detailed description in addition to this application.*

Business Owner Information

Applicant is also an owner of the property? Yes No (choose one)

(All beneficial owners of a Land Trust, members of a Limited Liability Company or a partnership must be listed.)

Owner Name(s): _____

Organization Name(s): _____

Owner(s) Phone Number: _____

Owner(s) Email Address: _____

Disclosure of Previous Incentives

Has the business owner or any beneficiaries of this project received any financial incentive or tax abatement from the City of Urbana in the last five years? Yes No (choose one; if yes, please attach a description)